



Speaker adjourns Knesset, Rivlin warns of 'undermining democracy'

Jonathan Lis

President Reuven Rivlin warned Knesset Speaker Yuli Edelstein of Likud that paralyzing the Knesset harms the country's ability to function during an emergency.

The coronavirus crisis, Rivlin said, must not be allowed "to critically damage our democratic infrastructure."

The president's warning comes after lawmakers from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud and Benny Gantz's Kahol Lavan could not agree on forming the committees which govern the parliament's activities – two weeks after the elections were held. Edelstein has adjourned the session until next Monday.

Nobel laureate says Israel is overreacting

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The move follows the president tasking Gantz with forming a coalition, but Gantz still lacks a clear majority. He does, however, hold a slight majority over Netanyahu's bloc. This advantage would have given him a majority in the important organizing committee.

One of the first steps Gantz took was to try to replace Edelstein. But Edelstein used his veto power to prevent that vote before the committees were formed.

By preventing the formation of the organizing committee, Edelstein also hampers the formation of oversight committees on the government's handling of the coronavirus crisis.

Likud, for its part, claimed that due to coronavirus emergency regulations, the committee must include no more than ten lawmakers, with no majority for either side.



Tel Aviv's Rabin Square on Wednesday. Tomer Appelbaum

Anshel Pfeffer

Ravit Hecht

For first time ever, Israeli democracy is shut down

At half-past three in the afternoon on Wednesday, March 18, 2020, Israel came the closest it's ever been to a total failure of parliamentary democracy. A majority of the Knesset members who had been elected just 16 days earlier and sworn in only on Monday, demanded an immediate vote on appointing a new Knesset speaker and empaneling

committees to oversee the government's actions in this moment of acute global crisis. But Yuli Edelstein, the speaker of the former Knesset, who still has control of parliamentary procedure until a new speaker is elected, adjourned the Knesset until next Monday.

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PM a good crisis manager but very dangerous leader

These are difficult times, infused with fear that isn't without foundation. First and foremost is the fear for life itself.

Yesterday an acquaintance from France, a sworn leftist who couldn't ever be suspected of being a Netanyahu fan in any way, sent a message to all his contacts in Israel. In the message, he wrote that he had

watched the prime minister's address and couldn't understand why Netanyahu hasn't imposed a total closure on Israel. He's taking a dangerous risk, he wrote.

That's right, a firebrand liberal humanist whom I had met in Israel at a Jewish-Palestinian memorial

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With 3,000 staffers in quarantine, hospitals face a new emergency

Ido Efrati

Nearly 3,000 medical personnel have been quarantined, including emergency room physicians and nurses as well as laboratory workers, as the coronavirus pandemic and the strategies the government is employing to combat it pose new challenges to the country's hospitals.

Regulations and guidelines are drawn up on the fly, amidst uncertainty. With the anticipated further spread of the disease, guaranteeing patients the treatment they need while protecting hospital staff members is expected to become increasingly challenging. On Thursday, 19 members of the medical staff in the emergency room

at Sheba Medical Center outside of Tel Aviv were ordered into quarantine after a physician colleague was diagnosed with the virus. He had returned from France, where cases now number in

sicians. Around 100 Sheba staff members are currently in isolation, and 193 staff members at four of central Israel's major hospitals – Ichilov in Tel Aviv, Beilinson in Petah Tikva and the two

at the front and you're not being given all of the means, the anxiety meter rises and the measurement of commitment and a willingness to pitch in declines."

The closure of the country's schools and preschools also greatly affects the medical teams, Feldman added. "The entire structure of hospital operations is based on employees with families and children, many of them young children. So in wealthier areas, with some initiative something is set up for employees' children, but I am getting calls from around the country [from people who say] they don't have this option."

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Health ministry texts 400 people that they were exposed to virus

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the thousands, on March 2.

Similar incidents are becoming increasingly common, forcing hospitals to change the way they operate, according to Dr. Zeev Feldman, director of pediatric neurosurgery at Sheba and the chairman of the Organization of State Employed Phy-

Hadassah Medical Center hospitals in Jerusalem – are also in quarantine.

"Doctors at various hospitals turn to me with their concerns," Feldman told Haaretz. "Some report that there's a sense of a supply shortage. When you work and feel that you are exposed

'The neighborhood is panicked'

Modi in corona epicenter becomes ghost town



Shoppers stocking up in the hard-hit Kiryat Yearim. Ohad Zwigenberg

Aaron Rabinowitz

The retail center near the Avnei Chen neighborhood of Modi'in was quiet on Tuesday afternoon. Most of the businesses were shuttered, and if you ask the few shoppers who were in the vicinity, the stores that remained opened should close too. From their standpoint, the time has come to declare a total lockdown of the neighborhood over the coronavirus outbreak in the city that lies midway between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

"That's how the Chinese have managed to curb the

virus in their country," said a shopper at a convenience store that was open. "We need to deploy soldiers with weapons – like in China."

His friend standing nearby said his wife was in home quarantine with their daughter. "She's at a school where they've put the children in quarantine, and I'm the only one who can leave home," he said. "They're sleeping in one room, and I'm in another."

In response to rising numbers of coronavirus cases around the country, the

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Screenshot Kan 11

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Democratic candidates Biden and Sanders do an elbow bump in lieu of a handshake ahead of their debate in Washington this week. Kevin LaMarque/Reuters

Biden cements decisive lead over Sanders in Dem primary

Amir Tibon

WASHINGTON – One month ago, there was a consensus among most political analysts and pundits in the United States that former Vice President Joe Biden had very little chance to win the Democratic presidential nomination.

After disappointing results in the first three states to vote in the Democratic primary – Iowa, New Hampshire and Nevada – some even called on him to quit the race and endorse another candidate.

On Tuesday, however, Biden practically ended the nomination contest with big wins in Florida, Illinois and Arizona. The three states that held primaries were supposed to be joined by Ohio, but that state's con-

test was delayed because of coronavirus. Recent polling showed Biden with a big lead there as well.

The Democratic primary has become a duel between Biden and Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders. Biden is currently leading comfortably in the number of delegates, and has already amassed more than half the delegates needed to win the nomination. Sanders' chances to win, which looked very good after the first Democratic primary votes, are currently very slim.

The first state to report its results Tuesday night was Florida, where Biden won 61 percent of the vote and Sanders just 23 percent. A big chunk of the Florida votes was "early voting" conducted by mail, which is why candidates who have already

dropped out of the race, such as former New York City Mayor Mike Bloomberg and Senators Elizabeth Warren and Amy Klobuchar, together received more than 10 percent of the vote. Biden's victory in the populous southern state came with strong backing from various demographic groups, most notably African American voters, who have tilted the primary strongly in his favor ever since the vote in South Carolina three weeks ago. However, as in previous states, exit polling showed a significant generation gap, with voters under 45 overwhelmingly preferring Sanders, and older voters strongly backing Biden.

An exit poll conducted by the Associated Press in

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sonable invasion of privacy. As a result, it was made clear that the regulations would be in effect for only 30 days, and that the Shin Bet could not make any other use of the information it gathers. After that period, the information collected is to be erased.

In response to the criticism, the Justice Ministry clarified that this surveillance would be subject to Knesset approval. But the Knesset subcommittee on secret services hasn't completed its discussions of the issue, and subcommittee chairman MK Gabi Ashkenazi (Kahol Lavan) refused to bring it to a vote without a debate. As a result, Netanyahu decided to circumvent the Knesset by getting emergency regulations to this effect approved early Tuesday morning. The move, which Kahol Lavan described as underhanded, will make it difficult for the legislative branch to supervise the surveillance or the use of the information that's gathered.